IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1 - 20. Canceled

21. (New): A method for obtaining an improved *Enterobacteriaceae* strain comprising,

a) obtaining a progenitor strain from the genera of *Pantoea, Enterobacter, Erwinia* or *Gluconobacter*, and

b) eliminating a cryptic plasmid from the progenitor strain to obtain an improved strain, said cryptic plasmid having a nucleic acid sequence of at least 90% sequence identity with SEQ ID NO:1 or SEQ ID NO:2.

22. (New): The method according to claim 21, wherein the progenitor strain is capable of producing 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate from a carbon source.

23. (New): The method according to claim 21, wherein the progenitor strain is a recombinant strain that comprises a heterologous nucleic acid sequence encoding a 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate reductase and is capable of converting 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate to 2-keto-L-gluconic acid.

24. (New): The method according to claim 21, wherein an open reading frame of the nucleic acid sequence of the cryptic plasmid encodes an amino acid sequence having the sequence of SEQ ID NO:3.

25. (New):   The method according to claim 21, wherein the progenitor strain is *Pantoea citrea* having ATCC accession number 31940.

26. (New): The method according to claim 21, wherein the cryptic plasmid has the nucleic acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO:1 or SEQ ID NO:2.

27. (New):   The improved *Enterobacteriaceae* strain obtained according to the method of claim 21, wherein the improved strain is able to grow at higher temperatures than the progenitor strain.

28. (New):   The improved *Enterobacteriaceae* strain of claim 27, wherein said strain is a *Pantoea* strain.

29. (New):   A method for reducing the mobilization properties of plasmids residing within an *Enterobacteriaceae* strain comprising,

a) obtaining an *Enterobacteriaceae* strain which includes a cryptic plasmid having a nucleic acid sequence of at least 95% sequence identity with SEQ ID NO:1 or SEQ ID NO:2, and

b) eliminating the cryptic plasmid.

30. (New):   The method according to claim 29, wherein the *Enterobacteriaceae* strain is a strain from the genera of *Pantoea, Enterobacter, Erwinia* or *Gluconobacter.*

31. (New):   The method according to claim 29, wherein the progenitor strain is capable of producing 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate from a carbon source.

32. (New):   The method according to claim 29, wherein the progenitor strain is a recombinant strain that comprises a heterologous nucleic acid sequence encoding a 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate reductase and is capable of converting 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate to 2-keto-L-gluconic acid.

33. (New):   A method for obtaining an improved *Pantoea* strain comprising,

a) obtaining a *Pantoea* strain which includes a cryptic plasmid, said cryptic plasmid having a nucleic acid sequence with at least 90% sequence identity to SEQ ID NO:1 or SEQ ID NO:2, and

b) eliminating the cryptic plasmid from the *Pantoea* strain thereby obtaining an improved *Pantoea* strain.

34. (New):   The method according to claim 33, wherein the *Pantoea* strain is a *Pantoea citrea* strain.

35. (New):   The method according to claim 33, wherein the *Pantoea* strain is a recombinant strain.

GC372 AM1203

36. (New):   The method according to claim 33, wherein the cryptic plasmid has a nucleic acid sequence with at least 95% sequence identity to SEQ ID NO:1 or SEQ ID NO:2.

37. (New):   The *Pantoea* strain obtained according to the method of claim 33.

38. (New):   The improved *Pantoea* strain obtained according to the method of claim 33, wherein the improved strain is able to grow at higher temperatures than the progenitor strain.